Agatha Christie

NEXT TO A DOG

A SHORT STORY

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Agatha Christie

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NEXT TO A DOG

The ladylike woman behind the Registry Office table cleared her throat and peered across at the girl who sat opposite.

"Then you refuse to consider the post? It only came in this morning. A very nice part of Italy, I believe, a widower with a little boy of three and an elderly lady, his mother or aunt."

Joyce Lambert shook her head.

"I can't go out of England," she said in a tired voice; "there are reasons. If only you could find me a daily post?"

Her voice shook slightly—ever so slightly, for she had it well under control. Her dark blue eyes looked appealingly at the woman opposite her.

"It's very difficult, Mrs. Lambert. The only kind of daily governess required is one who has full qualifications. You have none. I have hundreds on my books—literally hundreds." She paused. "You have someone at home you can't leave?"

Joyce nodded.

"A child?"

"No, not a child." And a faint smile flickered across her face.

"Well, it is very unfortunate. I will do my best, of course, but—"

The interview was clearly at an end. Joyce rose. She was biting her lip to keep the tears from springing to her eyes as she emerged from the frowsy office into the street.

"You mustn't," she admonished herself sternly. "Don't be a snivelling little idiot. You're panicking—that's what you're doing—panicking. No good ever came of giving way to panic. It's quite early in the day still and lots of things may happen. Aunt Mary ought to be good for a fortnight anyway. Come on, girl, step out, and don't keep your well-to-do relations waiting."

She walked down Edgware Road, across the park, and then down to Victoria Street, where she turned into the Army and Navy Stores. She went to the lounge and sat down glancing at her watch. It was just half past one.

Five minutes sped by and then an elderly lady with her arms full of parcels bore down upon her.

“Ah! There you are, Joyce. I’m a few minutes late, I’m afraid. The service is not as good as it used to be in the luncheon room. You’ve had lunch, of course?”

Joyce hesitated a minute or two, then she said quietly: “Yes, thank-you.”

“I always have mine at half past twelve,” said Aunt Mary, settling herself comfortably with her parcels. “Less rush and a clearer atmosphere. The curried eggs here are excellent.”

“Are they?” said Joyce faintly. She felt that she could hardly bear to think of curried eggs—the hot steam rising from them—the delicious smell! She wrenched her thoughts resolutely aside.

“You look peaky, child,” said Aunt Mary, who was herself of a comfortable figure. “Don’t go in for this modern fad of eating no meat. All fal-de-lal. A good slice off the joint never did anyone any harm.”

Joyce stopped herself from saying, “It wouldn’t do me any harm now.” If only Aunt Mary would stop talking about food. To raise your hopes by asking you to meet her at half past one and then to talk of curried eggs and slices of roast meat—oh! cruel—cruel.

“Well, my dear,” said Aunt Mary. “I got your letter—and it was very nice of you to take me at my word. I said I’d be pleased to see you anytime and so I should have been—but as it happens, I’ve just had an extremely good offer to let the house. Quite too good to be missed, and bringing their own plate and linen. Five months. They come in on Thursday and I go to Harrogate. My rheumatism’s been troubling me lately.”

“I see,” said Joyce. “I’m so sorry.”

“So it’ll have to be for another time. Always pleased to see you, my dear.”

“Thank you, Aunt Mary.”

“You know, you do look peaky,” said Aunt Mary, considering her attentively. “You’re thin, too; no flesh on your bones, and what’s happened to your pretty colour? You always had a nice healthy colour. Mind you take plenty of exercise.”

“I’m taking plenty of exercise today,” said Joyce grimly. She rose. “Well, Aunt Mary, I must be getting along.”

Back again—through St. James's Park this time, and so on through Berkeley Square and across Oxford Street and up Edgware Road, past Praed Street to the point where the Edgware Road begins to think of becoming something else. Then aside, through a series of dirty little streets till one particular dingy house was reached.

Joyce inserted her latchkey and entered a small frowsy hall. She ran up the stairs till she reached the top landing. A door faced her and from the bottom of this door a snuffling noise proceeded succeeded in a second by a series of joyful whines and yelps.

"Yes, Terry darling—it's Missus come home."

As the door opened, a white body precipitated itself upon the girl—an aged wire-haired terrier very shaggy as to coat and suspiciously bleary as to eyes. Joyce gathered him up in her arms and sat down on the floor.

"Terry darling! Darling, darling Terry. Love your Missus, Terry; love your Missus a lot!"

And Terry obeyed, his eager tongue worked busily, he licked her face, her ears, her neck and all the time his stump of a tail wagged furiously.

"Terry darling, what are we going to do? What's going to become of us? Oh! Terry darling, I'm so tired."

"Now then, miss," said a tart voice behind her. "If you'll give over hugging and kissing that dog, here's a cup of nice hot tea for you."

"Oh! Mrs. Barnes, how good of you."

Joyce scrambled to her feet. Mrs. Barnes was a big, formidable-looking woman. Beneath the exterior of a dragon she concealed an unexpectedly warm heart.

"A cup of hot tea never did anyone any harm," enunciated Mrs. Barnes, voicing the universal sentiment of her class.

Joyce sipped gratefully. Her landlady eyed her covertly.

"Any luck, miss—ma'am, I should say?"

Joyce shook her head, her face clouded over.

"Ah!" said Mrs. Barnes with a sigh. "Well, it doesn't seem to be what you might call a lucky day."

Joyce looked up sharply.

"Oh, Mrs. Barnes—you don't mean—"

Mrs. Barnes was nodding gloomily.

“Yes—it’s Barnes. Out of work again. What we’re going to do, I’m sure I don’t know.”

“Oh, Mrs. Barnes—I must—I mean you’ll want—”

“Now don’t you fret, my dear. I’m not denying but that I’d be glad if you’d found something—but if you haven’t—you haven’t. Have you finished that tea? I’ll take the cup.”

“Not quite.”

“Ah!” said Mrs. Barnes accusingly. “You’re going to give what’s left to that dratted dog—I know you.”

“Oh, please, Mrs. Barnes. Just a little drop. You don’t mind really, do you?”

“It wouldn’t be any use if I did. You’re crazy about that cantankerous brute. Yes, that’s what I say—and that’s what he is. As near as nothing bit me this morning, he did.”

“Oh, no, Mrs. Barnes! Terry wouldn’t do such a thing.”

“Growled at me—showed his teeth. I was just trying to see if there was anything could be done to those shoes of yours.”

“He doesn’t like anyone touching my things. He thinks he ought to guard them.”

“Well, what does he want to think for? It isn’t a dog’s business to think. He’d be well enough in his proper place, tied up in the yard to keep off burglars. All this cuddling! He ought to be put away, miss—that’s what I say.”

“No, no, no. Never. Never!”

“Please yourself,” said Mrs. Barnes. She took the cup from the table, retrieved the saucer from the floor where Terry had just finished his share, and stalked from the room.

“Terry,” said Joyce. “Come here and talk to me. What are we going to do, my sweet?”

She settled herself in the rickety armchair, with Terry on her knees. She threw off her hat and leaned back. She put one of Terry’s paws on each side of her neck and kissed him lovingly on his nose and between his eyes. Then she began talking to him in a soft low voice, twisting his ears gently between her fingers.

“What are we going to do about Mrs. Barnes, Terry? We owe her four weeks—and she’s such a lamb, Terry—such a lamb. She’d never turn us

out. But we can’t take advantage of her being a lamb, Terry. We can’t do that. Why does Barnes want to be out of work? I hate Barnes. He’s always getting drunk. And if you’re always getting drunk, you are usually out of work. But I don’t get drunk, Terry, and yet I’m out of work.

“I can’t leave you, darling. I can’t leave you. There’s not even anyone I could leave you with—nobody who’d be good to you. You’re getting old, Terry—twelve years old—and nobody wants an old dog who’s rather blind and a little deaf and a little—yes, just a little—bad-tempered. You’re sweet to me, darling, but you’re not sweet to everyone, are you? You growl. It’s because you know the world’s turning against you. We’ve just got each other, haven’t we, darling?”

Terry licked her cheek delicately.

“Talk to me, darling.”

Terry gave a long lingering groan—almost a sigh, then he nuzzled his nose in behind Joyce’s ear.

“You trust me, don’t you, angel? You know I’d never leave you. But what are we going to do? We’re right down to it now, Terry.”

She settled back further in the chair, her eyes half closed.

“Do you remember, Terry, all the happy times we used to have? You and I and Michael and Daddy. Oh, Michael—Michael! It was his first leave, and he wanted to give me a present before he went back to France. And I told him not to be extravagant. And then we were down in the country—and it was all a surprise. He told me to look out of the window, and there you were, dancing up the path on a long lead. The funny little man who brought you, a little man who smelt of dogs. How he talked. ‘The goods, that’s what he is. Look at him, ma’am, ain’t he a picture? I said to myself, as soon as the lady and gentleman see him they’ll say: “That dog’s the goods!’ ”

“He kept on saying that—and we called you that for quite a long time—the Goods! Oh, Terry, you were such a darling of a puppy, with your little head on one side, wagging your absurd tail! And Michael went away to France and I had you—the darlingest dog in the world. You read all Michael’s letters with me, didn’t you? You’d sniff them, and I’d say —‘From Master,’ and you’d understand. We were so happy—so happy. You and Michael and I. And now Michael’s dead, and you’re old, and I—I’m so tired of being brave.”

Terry licked her.

“You were there when the telegram came. If it hadn’t been for you, Terry—if I hadn’t had you to hold on to. . . .”

She stayed silent for some minutes.

“And we’ve been together ever since—been through all the ups and downs together—there have been a lot of downs, haven’t there? And now we’ve come right up against it. There are only Michael’s aunts, and they think I’m all right. They don’t know he gambled that money away. We must never tell anyone that. *I* don’t care—why shouldn’t he? Everyone has to have some fault. He loved us both, Terry, and that’s all that matters. His own relations were always inclined to be down on him and to say nasty things. We’re not going to give them the chance. But I wish I had some relations of my own. It’s very awkward having no relations at all.

“I’m so tired, Terry—and remarkably hungry. I can’t believe I’m only twenty-nine—I feel sixty-nine. I’m not really brave—I only pretend to be. And I’m getting awfully mean ideas. I walked all the way to Ealing yesterday to see Cousin Charlotte Green. I thought if I got there at half past twelve she’d be sure to ask me to stop to lunch. And then when I got to the house, I felt it was too cadging for anything. I just couldn’t. So I walked all the way back. And that’s foolish. You should be a determined cadger or else not even think of it. I don’t think I’m a strong character.”

Terry groaned again and put a black nose into Joyce’s eye.

“You’ve got a lovely nose still, Terry—all cold like ice cream. Oh, I do love you so! I can’t part from you. I can’t have you ‘put away,’ I can’t . . . I can’t . . . I can’t. . . .”

The warm tongue licked eagerly.

“You understand so, my sweet. You’d do anything to help Missus, wouldn’t you?”

Terry clambered down and went unsteadily to a corner. He came back holding a battered bowl between his teeth.

Joyce was midway between tears and laughter.

“Was he doing his only trick? The only thing he could think of to help Missus. Oh, Terry—Terry—nobody shall part us! I’d do anything. Would I, though? One says that—and then when you’re shown the thing, you say, ‘I didn’t mean anything like *that.*” Would I do anything?”

She got down on the floor beside the dog.

“You see, Terry, it’s like this. Nursery governesses can’t have dogs, and companions to elderly ladies can’t have dogs. Only married women can have dogs, Terry—little fluffy expensive dogs that they take shopping with them—and if one preferred an old blind terrier—well, why not?”

She stopped frowning and at that minute there was a double knock from below.

“The post. I wonder.”

She jumped up and hurried down the stairs, returning with a letter.

“It might be. If only. . . .”

She tore it open.

Dear Madam,

We have inspected the picture and our opinion is that it is not a genuine Cuyp and that its value is practically nil.

Yours truly,
Sloane & Ryder

Joyce stood holding it. When she spoke, her voice had changed.

“That’s that,” she said. “The last hope gone. But we won’t be parted. There’s a way—and it won’t be cadging. Terry darling, I’m going out. I’ll be back soon.”

Joyce hurried down the stairs to where the telephone stood in a dark corner. There she asked for a certain number. A man’s voice answered her, its tone changing as he realized her identity.

“Joyce, my dear girl. Come out and have some dinner and dance tonight.”

“I can’t,” said Joyce lightly. “Nothing fit to wear.”

And she smiled grimly as she thought of the empty pegs in the flimsy cupboard.

“How would it be if I came along and saw you now? What’s the address? Good Lord, where’s that? Rather come off your high horse, haven’t you?”

“Completely.”

“Well, you’re frank about it. So long.”

Arthur Halliday's car drew up outside the house about three quarters of an hour later. An awestruck Mrs. Barnes conducted him upstairs.

"My dear girl—what an awful hole. What on earth has got you into this mess?"

"Pride and a few other unprofitable emotions."

She spoke lightly enough; her eyes looked at the man opposite her sardonically.

Many people called Halliday handsome. He was a big man with square shoulders, fair, with small, very pale blue eyes and a heavy chin.

He sat down on the rickety chair she indicated.

"Well," he said thoughtfully. "I should say you'd had your lesson. I say—will that brute bite?"

"No, no, he's all right. I've trained him to be rather a—a watchdog."

Halliday was looking her up and down.

"Going to climb down, Joyce," he said softly. "Is that it?"

Joyce nodded.

"I told you before, my dear girl. I always get what I want in the end. I knew you'd come in time to see which way your bread was buttered."

"It's lucky for me you haven't changed your mind," said Joyce.

He looked at her suspiciously. With Joyce you never knew quite what she was driving at.

"You'll marry me?"

She nodded. "As soon as you please."

"The sooner, the better, in fact." He laughed, looking round the room. Joyce flushed.

"By the way, there's a condition."

"A condition?" He looked suspicious again.

"My dog. He must come with me."

"This old scarecrow? You can have any kind of a dog you choose. Don't spare expense."

"I want Terry."

"Oh! All right, please yourself."

Joyce was staring at him.

"You do know—don't you—that I don't love you? Not in the least."

"I'm not worrying about that. I'm not thin-skinned. But no hanky-panky, my girl. If you marry me, you play fair."

The colour flashed into Joyce’s cheeks.

“You will have your money’s worth,” she said.

“What about a kiss now?”

He advanced upon her. She waited, smiling. He took her in his arms, kissing her face, her lips, her neck. She neither stiffened nor drew back. He released her at last.

“I’ll get you a ring,” he said. “What would you like, diamonds or pearls?”

“A ruby,” said Joyce. “The largest ruby possible—the colour of blood.”

“That’s an odd idea.”

“I should like it to be a contrast to the little half hoop of pearls that was all that Michael could afford to give me.”

“Better luck this time, eh?”

“You put things wonderfully, Arthur.”

Halliday went out chuckling.

“Terry,” said Joyce. “Lick me—lick hard—all over my face and my neck—particularly my neck.”

And as Terry obeyed, she murmured reflectively:

“Thinking of something else very hard—that’s the only way. You’d never guess what I thought of—jam—jam in a grocer’s shop. I said it over to myself. Strawberry, blackcurrant, raspberry, damson. And perhaps, Terry, he’ll get tired of me fairly soon. I hope so, don’t you? They say men do when they’re married to you. But Michael wouldn’t have tired of me—never—never—never—Oh! Michael. . . .”

Joyce rose the next morning with a heart like lead. She gave a deep sigh and immediately Terry, who slept on her bed, had moved up and was kissing her affectionately.

“Oh, darling—darling! We’ve got to go through with it. But if only someting would happen. Terry darling, can’t you help Missus? You would if you could, I know.”

Mrs. Barnes brought up some tea and bread and butter and was heartily congratulatory.

“There now, ma’am, to think of you going to marry that gentleman. It was a Rolls he came in. It was indeed. It quite sobered Barnes up to think of

one of them Rolls standing outside our door. Why, I declare that dog's sitting out on the window sill."

"He likes the sun," said Joyce. "But it's rather dangerous. Terry, come in."

"I'd have the poor dear put out of his misery if I was you," said Mrs. Barnes, "and get your gentleman to buy you one of them plumy dogs as ladies carry in their muffs."

Joyce smiled and called again to Terry. The dog rose awkwardly and just at that moment the noise of a dog fight rose from the street below. Terry craned his neck forward and added some brisk barking. The window sill was old and rotten. It tilted and Terry, too old and stiff to regain his balance, fell.

With a wild cry, Joyce ran down the stairs and out of the front door. In a few seconds she was kneeling by Terry's side. He was whining pitifully and his position showed her that he was badly hurt. She bent over him.

"Terry—Terry darling—darling, darling, darling—"

Very feebly, he tried to wag his tail.

"Terry boy—Missus will make you better—darling boy—"

A crowd, mainly composed of small boys, was pushing round.

"Fell from the window, 'e did."

"My, 'e looks bad."

"Broke 'is back as likely as not."

Joyce paid no heed.

"Mrs. Barnes, where's the nearest vet?"

"There's Jobling—round in Mere Street—if you could get him there."

"A taxi."

"Allow me."

It was the pleasant voice of an elderly man who had just alighted from a taxi. He knelt down by Terry and lifted the upper lip, then passed his hand down the dog's body.

"I'm afraid he may be bleeding internally," he said. "There don't seem to be any bones broken. We'd better get him along to the vet's."

Between them, he and Joyce lifted the dog. Terry gave a yelp of pain. His teeth met in Joyce's arm.

"Terry—it's all right—all right, old man."

They got him into the taxi and drove off. Joyce wrapped a handkerchief round her arm in an absentminded way. Terry, distressed, tried to lick it.

"I know, darling; I know. You didn't mean to hurt me. It's all right. It's all right, Terry."

She stroked his head. The man opposite watched her but said nothing.

They arrived at the vet's fairly quickly and found him in. He was a red-faced man with an unsympathetic manner.

He handled Terry none too gently while Joyce stood by, agonized. The tears were running down her face. She kept on talking in a low, reassuring voice.

"It's all right, darling. It's all right. . . ."

The vet straightened himself.

"Impossible to say exactly. I must make a proper examination. You must leave him here."

"Oh! I can't."

"I'm afraid you must. I must take him below. I'll telephone you in—say—half an hour."

Sick at heart, Joyce gave in. She kissed Terry on his nose. Blind with tears, she stumbled down the steps. The man who had helped her was still there. She had forgotten him.

"The taxi's still here. I'll take you back." She shook her head.

"I'd rather walk."

"I'll walk with you."

He paid off the taxi. She was hardly conscious of him as he walked quietly by her side without speaking. When they arrived at Mrs. Barnes', he spoke.

"Your wrist. You must see to it."

She looked down at it.

"Oh! That's all right."

"It wants properly washing and tying up. I'll come in with you."

He went with her up the stairs. She let him wash the place and bind it up with a clean handkerchief. She only said one thing.

"Terry didn't mean to do it. He would never, *never* mean to do it. He just didn't realize it was me. He must have been in dreadful pain."

"I'm afraid so, yes."

"And perhaps they're hurting him dreadfully now?"

“I’m sure that everything that can be done for him is being done. When the vet rings up, you can go and get him and nurse him here.”

“Yes, of course.”

The man paused, then moved towards the door.

“I hope it will be all right,” he said awkwardly. “Good-bye.”

“Good-bye.”

Two or three minutes later it occurred to her that he had been kind and that she had never thanked him.

Mrs. Barnes appeared, cup in hand.

“Now, my poor lamb, a cup of hot tea. You’re all to pieces, I can see that.”

“Thank you, Mrs. Barnes, but I don’t want any tea.”

“It would do you good, dearie. Don’t take on so now. The doggie will be all right and even if he isn’t that gentleman of yours will give you a pretty new dog—”

“Don’t, Mrs. Barnes. Don’t. Please, if you don’t mind, I’d rather be left alone.”

“Well, I never—there’s the telephone.”

Joyce sped down to it like an arrow. She lifted the receiver. Mrs. Barnes panted down after her. She heard Joyce say, “Yes—speaking. What? Oh! Oh! Yes. Yes, thank you.”

She put back the receiver. The face she turned to Mrs. Barnes startled that good woman. It seemed devoid of any life or expression.

“Terry’s dead, Mrs. Barnes,” she said. “He died alone there without me.”

She went upstairs and, going into her room, shut the door very decisively.

“Well, I never,” said Mrs. Barnes to the hall wallpaper.

Five minutes later she poked her head into the room. Joyce was sitting bolt upright in a chair. She was not crying.

“It’s your gentleman, miss. Shall I send him up?”

A sudden light came into Joyce’s eyes.

“Yes, please. I’d like to see him.”

Halliday came in boisterously.

“Well, here we are. I haven’t lost much time, have I? I’m prepared to carry you off from this dreadful place here and now. You can’t stay here.

Come on, get your things on."

"There's no need, Arthur."

"No need? What do you mean?"

"Terry's dead. I don't need to marry you now."

"What are you talking about?"

"My dog—Terry. He's dead. I was only marrying you so that we could be together."

Halliday stared at her, his face growing redder and redder. "You're mad."

"I daresay. People who love dogs are."

"You seriously tell me that you were only marrying me because—Oh, it's absurd!"

"Why did you think I was marrying you? You knew I hated you."

"You were marrying me because I could give you a jolly good time—and so I can."

"To my mind," said Joyce, "that is a much more revolting motive than mine. Anyway, it's off. I'm not marrying you!"

"Do you realize that you are treating me damned badly?"

She looked at him coolly but with such a blaze in her eyes that he drew back before it.

"I don't think so. I've heard you talk about getting a kick out of life. That's what you got out of me—and my dislike of you heightened it. You knew I hated you and you enjoyed it. When I let you kiss me yesterday, you were disappointed because I didn't flinch or wince. There's something brutal in you, Arthur, something cruel—something that likes hurting . . . Nobody could treat you as badly as you deserve. And now do you mind getting out of my room? I want it to myself."

He spluttered a little.

"Wh—what are you going to do? You've no money."

"That's my business. Please go."

"You little devil. You absolutely maddening little devil. You haven't done with me yet."

Joyce laughed.

The laugh routed him as nothing else had done. It was so unexpected. He went awkwardly down the stairs and drove away.

Joyce heaved a sigh. She pulled on her shabby black felt hat and in her turn went out. She walked along the streets mechanically, neither thinking nor feeling. Somewhere at the back of her mind there was pain—pain that she would presently feel, but for the moment everything was mercifully dulled.

She passed the Registry Office and hesitated.

“I must do something. There’s the river, of course. I’ve often thought of that. Just finish everything. But it’s so cold and wet. I don’t think I’m brave enough. I’m not brave really.”

She turned into the Registry Office.

“Good morning, Mrs. Lambert. I’m afraid we’ve no daily post.”

“It doesn’t matter,” said Joyce. “I can take any kind of post now. My friend, whom I lived with, has—gone away.”

“Then you’d consider going abroad?”

Joyce nodded.

“Yes, as far away as possible.”

“Mr. Allaby is here now, as it happens, interviewing candidates. I’ll send you in to him.”

In another minute Joyce was sitting in a cubicle answering questions. Something about her interlocutor seemed vaguely familiar to her, but she could not place him. And then suddenly her mind awoke a little, aware that the last question was faintly out of the ordinary.

“Do you get on well with old ladies?” Mr. Allaby was asking.

Joyce smiled in spite of herself.

“I think so.”

“You see my aunt, who lives with me, is rather difficult. She is very fond of me and she is a great dear really, but I fancy that a young woman might find her rather difficult sometimes.”

“I think I’m patient and good-tempered,” said Joyce, “and I have always got on with elderly people very well.”

“You would have to do certain things for my aunt and otherwise you would have the charge of my little boy, who is three. His mother died a year ago.”

“I see.”

There was a pause.

“Then if you think you would like the post, we will consider that settled. We travel out next week. I will let you know the exact date, and I expect you would like a small advance of salary to fit yourself out.”

“Thank you very much. That would be very kind of you.”

They had both risen. Suddenly Mr. Allaby said awkwardly:

“I—hate to butt in—I mean I wish—I would like to know—I mean, is your dog all right?”

For the first time Joyce looked at him. The colour came into her face, her blue eyes deepened almost to black. She looked straight at him. She had thought him elderly, but he was not so very old. Hair turning grey, a pleasant weatherbeaten face, rather stooping shoulders, eyes that were brown and something of the shy kindliness of a dog’s. He looked a little like a dog, Joyce thought.

“Oh, it’s *you*,” she said. “I thought afterwards—I never thanked you.”

“No need. Didn’t expect it. Knew what you were feeling like. What about the poor old chap?”

The tears came into Joyce’s eyes. They streamed down her cheeks. Nothing on earth could have kept them back.

“He’s dead.”

“Oh!”

He said nothing else, but to Joyce that Oh! was one of the most comforting things she had ever heard. There was everything in it that couldn’t be put into words.

After a minute or two he said jerkily:

“Matter of fact, I had a dog. Died two years ago. Was with a crowd of people at the time who couldn’t understand making heavy weather about it. Pretty rotten to have to carry on as though nothing had happened.”

Joyce nodded.

“I *know*—” said Mr. Allaby.

He took her hand, squeezed it hard and dropped it. He went out of the little cubicle. Joyce followed in a minute or two and fixed up various details with the ladylike person. When she arrived home. Mrs. Barnes met her on the doorstep with that relish in gloom typical of her class.

“They’ve sent the poor little doggie’s body home,” she announced. “It’s up in your room. I was saying to Barnes, and he’s ready to dig a nice little hole in the back garden—”

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About the Author

AGATHA CHRISTIE is the most widely published author of all time, outsold only by the Bible and Shakespeare. Her books have sold more than a billion copies in English and another billion in a hundred foreign languages. She died in 1976.

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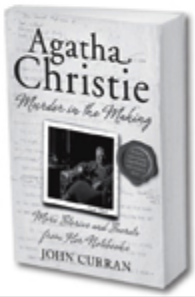

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